

BLACK is WHITE

"You told him because you knew she did not love you? And you loved Matilda—God pity your poor soul! For no more than I have done you drove her out of your house. You accuse me in your heart when you sent your rage on that poor boy. Oh, I know! You suspect me! And you suspected the other one. Before God, I swear to you that you have more cause to suspect me than Matilda. She was not untrue to you. She could not have loved anyone else but you. I know—God help me, I know! Don't come near me! Not now! I tell you that Matilda loved no one but you. You drove her out. You drove Frederic out. And you will drive me out."

She stood over him like an accusing angel, her arms extended. He shrank back, glancing.

"Why do you say these things to me? You cannot know—you have no right to say—"

"I am sorry for you, James Brood," she murmured, suddenly relaxing. Her body swayed against the table, and then she sank limply into the chair alongside. "You will never forget that you struck a man who was asleep, absolutely asleep. That's why I am sorry for you."

"Asleep!" he murmured, putting his hand to his eyes. "Yes, yes—he was asleep! Yvonne, I—I have never been so near to loving him as I am now. I—I—"

"I am going up to him. Don't try to stop me. But first let me ask you a question. What did Frederic say when you told him his mother was—was what you claim?"

Brood lowered his head. "He said that I was a cowardly liar."

"And it was then that you began to feel that you loved him. Ah, I see you are a great, strong man—a wonderful man in spite of all this. You have a heart—a heart that still needs breaking before you can ever hope to be happy."

He gasped. "As if my heart hasn't already been broken," he gasped.

"Your head has been hurt, that's all. There is a vast difference. Are you going out?"

He looked at her in dull amazement. Slowly he began to pull himself together.

"Yes. I think you should go to him. I—I gave him an hour to—"

"To get out?"

"Yes. He must go, you see. See him, if you will. I shall not oppose you. Find out what he expects to do."

She passed swiftly by him as he started toward the door. In the hall, which was bright with the sunlight from the upper windows, she turned to face him. To his astonishment, her cheeks were aglow and her eyes bright with eagerness. She seemed almost radiant.

"Yes! It needs breaking, James," she said, and went up the stairs, leaving him standing there dumfounded. Near the top she began to hum a blithe tune. It came down to him distinctly—the weird little air that had haunted him for years—Feverella!

CHAPTER XVII.

Foul Weather.

To Brood's surprise, she came half-way down the steps again, and, leaning over the railing, spoke to him with a voice full of irony.

"Will you be good enough to call off your spy, James?"

"What do you mean?" He had started to put on his light overcoat.

"I think you know," she said, briefly.

"Do you consider me so mean, so infamous as—" he began hotly.

"Nevertheless, I feel happier when I know he is out of the house. Call off your dog, James."

He smothered an execration and then called out harshly to Jones. "Ask Tanjab to attend me here, Jones. He is to go out with me," he said to the butler a moment later. Yvonne was still leaning over the banister, a scornful smile on her lips.

"I shall wait until you are gone. I intend to see Frederic alone," he said, with marked emphasis on the final word.

"As you like," said he, coldly.

She crossed the upper hall and disappeared from view down the corridor leading to her own room. Her lips were set with decision; a wild, reckless light filled her eyes, and the smile of scorn had given way to one of exaltation. Her breath came fast and tremulously through quivering nostrils as she closed her door and hurried across to the little vine-covered balcony.

"The time has come—the time has come, thank God," she was saying to herself, over and over again.

She turned her attention to the window across the court and two floors above her—the howling curtain window in Brood's "retreat." There was no sign of life there, so she hurried to the front of the house to wait for the departure of James Brood and his man.

The two were going down the front steps. At the bottom Brood spoke to Tanjab and the latter, as imperturbable as a rock, bowed low and moved off in an opposite direction to the taken by his master. She watched

until both were out of sight. Then she rapidly mounted the stairs to the top floor.

Frederic was lying on the couch near the bedroom door. She was able to distinguish his long, dark figure after peering intently about the shadowy interior in what seemed at first to be a vain search for him. She shrank back, her eyes fixed in horror upon the prostrate shadow. Suddenly he stirred and then half raised himself on one elbow to stare at the figure in the doorway.

"Is it you?" he whispered, hoarsely, and dropped back with a great sigh on his lips.

Her heart leaped. The blood rushed back to her face. Quickly closing the door, she advanced into the room, her tread as swift and as soft as a cat's.

"He has gone out. We are quite alone," she said, stopping to lean against the table, suddenly faint with excitement.

He laughed, a bitter, merciless, snarling laugh.

"Get up, Frederic. Be a man! I know what has happened. Get up! I want to talk it over with you. We must plan. We must decide now—at

once—before he returns." The words broke from her lips with sharp, staccato-like emphasis.

He came to a sitting posture slowly, all the while staring at her with a dull wonder in his heavy eyes.

"Pull yourself together," she cried, hurriedly. "We cannot talk here. I am afraid in this room. It has ears, I know. That awful Hindu is always here, even though he may seem to be elsewhere. We will go down to my boudoir."

He slowly shook his head and then allowed his chin to sink dejectedly into his hands. With his elbows on his knees he watched her movements in a state of increasing interest and bewilderment. She turned abruptly to the Buddha, whose placid, unsmiling countenance seemed to be alive to the situation in all of its aspects. Standing close, her hands behind her back, her figure very erect and theatrical, she proceeded to address the image in a voice full of mockery.

"Well, my chatterbox friend, I have pierced his armor, haven't I? He will creep up here and ask you, his wonderful god, to tell him what to do about it, all—e?" His wits are tangled. He doubts his senses. And when he comes to you, my friend, and whines his secret doubts into your excellent and trustworthy ear, do me the kindness to keep the secret! I shall now whisper to you, for I trust you, too, you amiable fraud!" Standing on tip-toe, she put her lips to the Buddha's ear and whispered. Frederic, across the room, roused from his lethargy by the strange words and still stranger action, rose to his feet and took several steps toward her. "There! Now you know everything. You know more than James Brood knows, for you know what his charming wife is about to do next!" She drew back and regarded the image through half-closed, smoldering eyes. "But he will know before long—before long."

"What are you doing, Yvonne?" demanded Frederic, unsteadily.

She whirled about and came toward him, her hands still clasped behind her back.

"Come with me," she said, ignoring his question.

"He—he thinks I am in love with you," said he, shaking his head.

"And are you not in love with me?"

He was startled. "Good Lord, Yvonne!"

She came quite close to him. He could feel the warmth that traveled from her body across the short space that separated them. The intoxicating perfume filled his nostrils; he drew a deep breath, his eyes closing slowly as his senses prepared to succumb to the delicious spell that came over him. When he opened them an instant later, she was still facing him, as straight and fearless as a soldier, and the light of victory was in her dark, compelling eyes.

"Well," she said, deliberately, "I am ready to go away with you."

He fell back stunned beyond the power of speech. His brain was filled with a thousand clattering noises.

"He has turned you out," she went on rapidly. "He disowns you. Very well; the time has come for me to exact payment from him for that and for all that has gone before. I shall go away with you. I—"

"Impossible!" he cried, finding his

footstep and drawing still farther away from her.

"Are you not in love with me?" she whispered softly.

He put his hands to his eyes to shut out the alluring vision.

"For God's sake, Yvonne—leave me. Let me go my way. Let me—"

"He cursed your mother! He cursed you! He damned you—as he damned her. You can pay him up for everything. You owe nothing to him. He has killed every—"

Frederic straightened up suddenly, and with a loud cry of exaltation raised his clenched hands above his head.

"By heaven, I will break him! I will make him pay! Do you know what he has done to me? Listen to this! He boasts of having reared me to manhood, as one might bring up a prize beast, that he might make me pay for the wrong that my poor mother did a quarter of a century ago. All these years he has had in mind this thing that he has done today. All my life has been spent in preparation for the sacrifice that came an hour ago. I have suffered all these years in ignorance of—"

"Not so loud!" she whispered, alarmed by the vehemence of his re-awakened fury.

"Oh, I'm not afraid!" he cried, savagely. "Can you imagine anything more diabolical than the scheme he has had in mind all these years? To pay out my mother—whom he loved and still loves—yes, by heaven, he still loves her!—he works to this beastly end. He made her suffer the agonies of the damned up to the day of her death by refusing her the right to have the child that he swears is no child of his. Oh, you don't know the story—you don't know the kind of man you have for a husband—you don't—"

"Yes, yes, I do know," she cried, violently, beating her breast with clinched hands. "I do know! I know that he still loves the poor girl who went out of this house with his curses ringing in her ears a score of years ago, and who died still hearing them. And I had almost come to the point of pitying him—I was failing—I was weakening. He is a wonderful man. I—I was losing myself. But that is all over. Three months ago I could have left him without a pang—yesterday I was afraid that it would never be possible. Today he makes it easy for me. He has hurt you beyond all reason, not because he hates you but because he loved your mother."

"But you do love him," cried Frederic, in stark wonder. "You don't care the snap of your finger for me. What is all this you are saying, Yvonne? You must be mad. Think! Think what you are saying."

"I have thought—I am always thinking. I know my own mind well enough. It is settled; I am going away and I am going with you."

"I cannot listen to you, Yvonne," cried Frederic, aghast. His heart was pounding so fiercely that the blood surged to his head in great waves, almost stunning him with its velocity.

"We go tomorrow," she cried out, in an ecstasy of triumph. She was convinced that he would go! "La Provençal!"

"Good God in heaven!" he gasped, dropping suddenly into a chair and burying his face in his shaking hands.

"What will this mean to Lydia—what will she do—what will become of her?"

A quiver of pain crossed the woman's face, her eyelids fell as if to shut out something that shamed her in spite of all her vainglorious protestations. Then the spirit of exaltation resumed its sway.

"You cannot marry Lydia now," she said, affecting a sharpness of tone that caused him to shrink involuntarily. "It is your duty to write her a letter to-night, explaining all that has happened today. She would sacrifice herself for you today, but there is tomorrow! A thousand tomorrows, Frederic. Don't forget them, my dear. They would be ugly after all, and she is too good, too fine to be dragged into—"

"You are right!" he exclaimed, leaping to his feet. "It would be the vilest act that a man could perpetrate. Why—why it would be proof of what he says of me—it would stamp me forever the bastard he—No, no, I could never lift my head again if I were to do this utterly vile thing to Lydia. He said to me here—not an hour ago—that he expected me to go ahead and blight that loyal girl's life, that I would consider it a noble means of self-justification! What do you think of that? He— But wait! What is this that we are proposing to do? Give me time to think! Why—why, I can't take you away from him, Yvonne! God in heaven, what am I thinking of? Have I no sense of honor? Am I—"

"You are not his son," she said, significantly.

"But that is no reason why I should stoop to a foul trick like this. Do—do you know what you are suggesting?" He drew back from her with a look of disgust in his eyes. "No! I'm not that vile! I—"

"Frederic, you must let me—"

"I don't want to hear anything more, Yvonne. What manner of woman are you? He is your husband, he loves you, he trusts you—oh, yes, he does! And you would leave him the this? You would—"

"Hush! Not so loud!" she cried, in great agitation.

"And let me tell you something more. Although I can never marry Lydia, by heaven, I shall love her to the end of my life. I will not betray that love. To the end of time she shall know that my love for her is real and true and—"

"Wait! Give me time to think," she pleaded. He shook his head resolutely.



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